

When Joe Smith asked me to speak at tonight's dinner, I readily accepted because this gives me the chance to thank you in person for the important work the Salvation Army is doing.

The Salvation Army is faith in action. It represents the very best that is America. You work not only to change the difficult circumstances people sometimes find themselves in you work to transform their lives, to "meet human needs in His name." Those in the Salvation Army and those who support it lead with their hearts, are guided by their faith, and change the communities in which they live for the better.

When William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was asked to prepare an inspirational message for his troops, he used only one word: "Others."

"Others." That's central to our faith – to love others as we love ourselves.

"Others" are the people you reach out to and help every single day. With your wide range of services, the Salvation Army helps individuals and families overcome daunting obstacles. From substance abuse to shelters for the abused to hot meals for the hungry – and so much more.

Through each of these ministries, you're answering the Salvation Army's call to be a shelter in the storm. And whenever we have a hurricane on the Gulf Coast, you answer that call literally. Thank you.

As Albert Einstein said, "Only a life lived for others is a life worth while." That embodies the Salvation Army's mission and our faith as Christians.

Everyone in this room knows these are times of deep needs and real suffering. During these difficult economic times, serving others has never been more important. The number of individuals and families turning to organizations like the Salvation Army is growing. The demand for your services is growing.

And as we all know, when people are under a lot of economic stress and anxiety as they are today, many of them need more than just a helping hand to get back on their feet. Problems like addiction and abandonment, domestic violence and mental illness all increase when people face tough times.

We – our state – want to be there to help you continue your important mission, and we can through our Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

Five years ago we created this office to help religious charitable organizations compete equally for federal grants – without having to change their missions.

I believe one of the most effective ways government can help those in need is to help our faith and community groups that are working every day to transform lives with acts of compassion.

For too long, government did not. If your organization had a faith component, it was met by a big STOP sign when it came to government. Government did not tap the skills, talents and experience of our faith-based organizations, even though many of them – like the Salvation Army – are some of America's most effective groups when it comes to helping the needy. For years government actively resisted them. But faith is not something government should fear. Instead, faith is a power that can make our society truly great. Faith lifts up the meek, brings comfort to the destitute and strength to the broken.

As President Bush did at the national level, we set up a state-level Faith-Based office to ensure that all groups providing public services compete on a level playing field when it comes to grants. Now, the discrimination against faith organizations is over. Today, our government can stand with them and be on their side as they reach out to our hurting neighbors in desperate need of help.

And today, thanks to this partnership, we are finding new ways to address old challenges. Let me give you a couple of examples.

Our faith community is heavily involved now in a state effort to help former prisoners re-enter society as law-abiding citizens. Every year about 11,000 former prisoners return to our communities. Without help, a third of them will end up back in prison within three years of their release. We can stop that cycle and make our communities safer by helping them make the transition back to society. They need help with jobs, housing and training. But they also need something a government bureaucracy can't provide: They need spiritual support. That's why we've engaged the faith community in Alabama to help us provide pre-release and post-release support for these prisoners. This has led to the creation of the Community Partnership for Recovery and Re-entry.

Another area where we have better engaged the faith community is in disaster preparedness. Now when it comes to disaster response, there's really no need to urge faith organizations to get involved. They are among the first whenever there's a disaster – providing shelter, feeding those who have lost their homes, and offering support and encouragement.

But helping citizens to prepare themselves and their families for disaster, that's where we needed help. That's where we needed to put a greater focus. And our churches and other faith-based organizations have a special ability to do that because of the high level of trust people place in them.

That's why we have events like "Be Ready Sunday," when ministers throughout the state deliver the message of preparedness from their pulpits. It's why we have groups like the Salvation Army and others volunteering to put disaster kits together and distributing them to neighborhoods before an emergency strikes. It can never be quantified, but there is no doubt these efforts have saved lives. Preparing for disaster is something few people think about ahead of time. But people tend to pay more attention when their pastor says it to them – a pastor they have a relationship with, someone they trust. That's something government can't replicate.

You have the ability to help more people on an individual basis than government ever could. Government can provide funds or programs but it can't provide spiritual and emotional support. It can't give someone positive direction for their life. When the Salvation Army looks into the faces of poverty, you see pain, despair and need. But above all, in every face, you see the image of God. Government bureaucracies can't do that. And that makes all the difference in truly helping others, as we are all called to do.